

“Mommy, I’m Hungry”

A Children’s Sermon

by Jeffrey Zurheide

I have offered a children’s time during the morning worship services at our church, for the past five or so years, with several goals in mind: first, to give the children a sense that they are important; second, to incarnate in some way the approachability of God through my interactions with them; and third, to leave them with one simple truth from the biblical theme of that service. (And, of course, the adults often gain much from the overflow.) On one particular Hunger Emphasis Sunday, I decided to try to press home a simple phrase I had heard used by another worship leader at a Hunger Forum: “Mommy, I’m hungry.” In order to bring this all-too-familiar request to life (my own children probably say it themselves three times an afternoon), I asked five members of the congregation to stand up one by one and say “Mommy, I’m hungry” in languages other than English. Our choices were Spanish, French, German, Japanese and Norwegian, but you may have many other options in your faith community. After each of the five finished reciting from different places in the sanctuary, I turned to the children and asked what that was all about. After receiving little feedback except puzzled shrugs and “I dunno’s,” I told them what each person had said: “Mommy, I’m hungry.” I then asked if they ever used that line themselves. They all came alive, saying things like “Yeah, when I get home from school I ask for a snack” and “I say that just before dinner.” I pointed out that, in many households in our culture, families eat three meals a day, *plus* snacks. They all agreed, and after allowing them to tell me about their favorite snacks, I asked them what they thought the children of Sudan, Somalia, North Korea, or war-torn Bosnia snack on. They all pretty much agreed, “probably nothing.”

I then spoke a bit about the relative abundance of food in our own land—supermarkets crammed with almost any food one could imagine, and “all you can eat” restaurants. And then I tried to wrap things up with a few concrete “what we can do’s.” I mentioned prayer and contributing to the various food drives in which our church participates, but I also invited them to walk in our town’s upcoming CROP Walk, to help feed hungry people with their own two feet.

I concluded with another mention of “Mommy, I’m hungry” asking them to think about all of the mommies (parents) of the world who can only respond “I know, but I have nothing to give you.”

We also closed with a prayer for our world’s hungry children. One never knows what children may glean from such an experience together. We did have a greater number of them participate in our recent CROP Walk, but beyond that, I pray that they might grow up with a greater sensitivity to the reality of hunger and poverty—and by God’s grace decrease it tomorrow. For they are tomorrow’s adults; tomorrow’s citizens of the world.

—At this writing, Jeff Zurheide was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. From Sacred Seasons, Hunger Emphasis 1998, “I Was Hungry and You Fed Me.”

art by Lenora Mathis

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